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THE PROLOGUE OF CHAUCER'S "LYF OF SEINT CECILE"

The most interesting critical problems relating to Chaucer's *Lyf of St. Cecile* (The Second Nun's Tale) are those which have to do with the Prologue rather than with the tale itself. It is in the Prologue that one finds the well-known reference to the "sone of Eue," which establishes the fact that this legend was composed before the *Canterbury Tales* had been planned. In this Prologue, moreover, occurs a passage imitated from the *Paradiso*, which is commonly regarded as the earliest appearance in Chaucer's works of the influence of Dante. The obvious importance of this Prologue, therefore, to the whole question of Chaucerian chronology—at present the storm center of Chaucerian criticism—makes it worth while to undertake a somewhat detailed examination of its structure.

The Prologue begins with four introductory stanzas which are so ill suited to the present setting of the Tale that we may be sure they were not revised by Chaucer when he decided to incorporate the *Lyf of St. Cecile* in the Canterbury collection. Indeed, the scribe of Camb. MS. Dd. 4. 24 was so far impressed with this lack of adjustment that he wrote at the head of this Tale: "Heere endeth the Tale of the Nonnes Preest & bigynneth the Secund Nonnes Tale of Seynt Cecile *with-oute a Prologe.*" These first four stanzas, it is clear, with their reference to the evils which attend Idleness, form an introduction appropriate to a *writer*, not to a narrator.

The suggestion for these remarks upon idleness, it has been somewhat hastily assumed, Chaucer took from Jehan de Vignay, who prefixed to his translation of the *Legenda Aurea* a Prologue on the

dangers of "oysiuete," made up for the most part of quotations from the Fathers.¹ The likelihood that Chaucer was influenced by the prologue of this French translator is, however, seriously lessened by the fact, which the researches of Kölbing² and Holt-hausen³ have established, that Chaucer's story of St. Cecile, so far from following De Vignay's version in preference to the Latin text, is not directly based on the *Legenda Aurea* at all. In this case, one may ask, what chance is there that Chaucer had De Vignay's Prologue before him when he wrote the lines on Idleness with which he prefaces his story? Moreover, De Vignay's Prologue, even if Chaucer had consulted it, could have given him nothing more than the suggestion that he compose another of his own. For in contents the two Prologues resemble each other only in the single respect that both deal with the evils of Idleness. Instead of the patristic authorities marshaled in the French prologue, Chaucer gives us quotations from Jean de Meun and Dionysius Cato. The reference to Idleness, in Chaucer's third line, as porter of the gate of delices, is plainly inspired, as Professor Skeat⁴ points out, by the *Roman de la Rose*. But Professor Skeat is surely mistaken in suggesting that Chaucer's characterization of Idleness, in the first line, as

The ministre and the norice vn-to vices

is to be traced back through De Vignay to St. Bernard. The idea here expressed is more directly related to one of Cato's distiches:

Plus vigila semper, ne somno deditus esto.

Nam diuturna quies vitiis alimenta ministrat.

—Lib. I, dist. 2.

The notion that Chaucer's introductory stanzas owe any obligation to the translator of the *Legenda Aurea* becomes still more improbable when one observes that similar remarks upon Idleness were frequently expressed by authors and translators when they took pen in hand. To take an example strikingly similar to Chaucer's

¹ Jehan de Vignay's Prologue is printed in *Originals and Analogues*, 190-91. Professor Skeat (*Oxford Chaucer*, V, 401) states that the idea for the first four stanzas of Chaucer's Prologue was taken from De Vignay.

² *Engl. Stud.*, I, 215-29.

³ *Herrigs Archiv*, LXXXVII, 265-73.

⁴ *Oxford Chaucer*, V, 401.

lines, I may quote the opening lines of the Prologue written by the unknown author of the Scottish collection of Saints' Legends:¹

Catone sais, þat suthfaste thing is,
 þat Idilnes giffis novrysingis
 to vicis. þare-for, quha-sa wil be
 vertuise suld Idilnes fle
 as sais þe romance of þe rose.²

The comparison of this passage with Chaucer's becomes the more remarkable when one considers that the situation is almost identical. Both poets are about to undertake the translation of saints' legends—in Chaucer's case, to be sure, it is only a single legend—in order to escape the dangers of idleness. The Scottish poet, who is a superannuate priest, tells us:

ȝet, for til eschew ydilnes,
 I hafe translatit symply
 sume part, as I fand in story,
 of mary & hir sone Ihesu (vss. 36-39).

The date of the Scottish collection is given by its editor, on linguistic grounds, as "about the year 1400" (p. xxii). So far as chronology goes, therefore, it would be quite possible to suppose that the author knew the *Lyf of St. Cecile*. Yet such a supposition is, to my mind, too improbable to be seriously considered. The Scottish translator closely follows the text of the *Legenda Aurea*, and in his story of St. Cecile (No. XLIII) betrays no acquaintance with Chaucer's version. Moreover, though he refers to the *Roman de la Rose*, he does not use the figure of the porter of the gate. Finally, it should be remarked, this characterization of Idleness is a commonplace. I may refer to the "Dietorie," printed by Dr. Furnivall from Lambeth MS 853, in which the reader is warned against Idleness:

And also of long sleep and of ydilnesse
 The which of alle vicis sche is porteresse.³

¹ Horstmann, who first edited this collection, assigned the authorship to Barbour, but his evidence has been refuted by Dr. P. Buss (*Sind die von Horstmann herausgeschottischen Legenden ein Werk Barbours?* Halle, 1886), whose conclusions are accepted by Dr. Metcalfe, the more recent editor of the collection.

² *Legends of the Saints in the Scot. Dialect of the XIV Cent.*, Ed. W. M. Metcalfe (Scot. Text Soc., 1896), p. 1.

³ *Babees Book*, EETS, 1868, p. 56; cf. also the original Latin text (in Sloane MS 3534):

Pigricies mane sompnolenta ociositas que
 Mater viciorum omnium est janitrix dicta (*ibid.*, p. 57).

And in the sixteenth century we find John Rolland explaining in the Prologue of the *Court of Venus* that he has undertaken the composition of the poem to keep himself from idleness:

For Idilnes is Mother Radycall,
Of all vicis, and font originall.
Thocht the corps ly in ociositie,
ȝit than the thoct can neuer idill be.
Bot ay mouand on vertew, or on vice,
Of guid, or euill findand sum new dew [ice]
And the maist part to peruersitie geuin
Quhilk throw maistrie of Idilnes is di []
And siclyk als throw wickit compan[ie]
Mannis maneris may oftymes chang[e].
And for that cause, sic cumpanie to [tell]
This wark and cuir I tuik vpon my sell.¹

This recognition of the fact that authors frequently begin their tasks by inveighing against idleness certainly gives us the right to dismiss De Vignay from further consideration as a "source" for Chaucer. It should at the same time put us on our guard against the chronological deduction drawn from this passage by ten Brink,² who finds in these references to Idleness conclusive proof that the *Lyf of St. Cecile* was composed before Chaucer entered upon his active duties at the Customs Office. That ten Brink should take Chaucer's words with such extreme literalness is especially surprising since he freely concedes that a host of writers before Chaucer had begun their prologues in the same vein. One surely may recognize Chaucer's use of convention without regarding him as "einen gedankenlosen schwätzer . . . der nach art eines papageis ohne verständniss wiederholt, was ihm vorgesagt wird." These first four stanzas, with their somewhat obvious moral sentiment, need not, it seems to me, detain us longer. We shall make no mistake if we accept the simplest view of the case and the one which lies nearest to hand, namely, that Chaucer wrote these lines in accordance with convention, and merely as a convenient way of addressing himself to his task.

¹ Ed. W. Gregor (Scot. Text Soc., 1884), p. 10. The *Court of Venus* was written, it appears, in 1560.

² *Chaucer Studien*, p. 138; cf. also *Engl. Stud.*, XVII, 12. Ten Brink's inferences in this matter are followed unquestioningly by Koch, *Chronol. of Chaucer's Writings* (Chaucer Soc., 1890), p. 28.

These introductory stanzas are followed by an *Inuocacio ad Mariam*, extending from vs. 29 to vs. 77. The relation of this Invocation to the rest of the Prologue is, now, the real problem to be solved. In order to reach any definite conclusion in regard to the matter it will be necessary to consider, first, the structure of the Invocation itself, and second, the way in which the Invocation is joined to the lines which precede and follow. It will be convenient to begin with the question of its internal structure.

It has long been recognized that vss. 36-56 in the Invocation are, with the exception of vss. 45-49, which form a digression, closely modeled upon the prayer to the Virgin at the beginning of Canto XXXIII of the *Paradiso*.¹ Accepting without question Dante's direct influence upon Chaucer in this passage, we proceed to inquire as to the source of the rest of the Invocation. For, without reflecting upon Chaucer's originality, it may fairly be supposed that this parallel, which covers only 16 of the 49 lines in the Invocation, does not make up the sum of his obligations. When one looks about for the most likely source from which Chaucer might have borrowed material for a composition of this sort, one thinks first of all of the liturgy of the Church, which abounded in hymns in praise of the Virgin and which, moreover, must have been thoroughly familiar to any poet of the fourteenth century. And in several passages we shall find unmistakable evidence of the influence of these Latin hymns upon Chaucer's lines.

The first instance occurs in the third stanza (vss. 43-49), in which occurs the digression from Dante already noted above. The structure of this stanza is of special interest on account of the skilful combination which it reveals of material drawn from several different sources. The first two lines have hitherto been regarded as based entirely upon Dante's third *terzina*:

*Nel ventre tuo si raccese l'amore,
Per lo cui caldo nell' eterna pace
Così è germinato questo fiore.*

¹ The single exception to this view which I have noticed is a somewhat guarded remark by Mr. A. W. Pollard in the Introduction to his edition of the *Cant. Tales*, that "the way in which the Dante lines occur is rather suggestive of their being derived from some common original, probably a Latin hymn, than taken straight from the *Paradiso*" (Lond., 1894, p. xiv, note). A year later, however, in his *Chaucer Primer*, Mr. Pollard appears to have receded from this position, for he speaks of the Invocation as "imitated from the *Paradiso*" (p. 34).

But the parallel does not extend beyond the phrases which I have italicized. And the remaining lines in Chaucer's third stanza are wholly independent of Dante. A more important source for this stanza is to be found in the opening lines of a hymn by Venantius Fortunatus:

Quem terra, pontus, aethera
colunt, adorant, praedicant,
trinam regentem machinam,
claustrum Mariae bajulat.¹

Chaucer's first line, "Within the cloistre blisful of thy sydes," which has hitherto been regarded as built upon Dante's "nel ventre tuo," is now seen to owe a direct suggestion to the "claustrum Mariae" in the hymn. In the second line the phrase, "the eternal loue and pees," is a literal borrowing from Dante. But in the third line Chaucer turns again to the hymn, which he paraphrases closely in the words,

That of the tryne compas lorde and gyde is,
Whom erthe and see and heuen, out of relees,
Ay herien.

For the concluding lines of the stanza I can find no such close parallel in any of the Latin hymns. The thought is a commonplace, and there is in the phraseology nothing striking which would suggest direct borrowing. Nevertheless, it may be worth while, perhaps, to compare with these lines a couplet in the well-known responsorium, *Gaude Maria*:

Dum Virgo Deum et hominem genuisti,
Et post partum Virgo inviolata permansisti.

In the fourth stanza practically everything is to be referred directly to the *Paradiso*. Two phrases which have no counterpart in the Italian are, "the sonne of excellence" (vs. 52), and "her lyues leche" (vs. 56). The first of these Mr. Paget Toynbee² proposes to bring into conformity with Dante's

in te s'aduna
Quantunque in creatura è di bontate,

¹ Mone, *Lat. Hymn. des Mittelalt.*, II, 128; Daniel, *Thes. Hymnol.*, I, 172; this hymn is also found, with an Anglo-Saxon gloss, in Durham MS B, III, 32, fol. 22, from which it has been printed by Stevenson (*Lat. Hymns of the Anglo-Sax. Church*, Surtees Soc., 1851, p. 74). Cf. also the English commentary on these lines, "The Myoure of Oure Ladye," EETS, Ext. Ser., 220.

² *Athenaeum*, October 15, 1904, p. 518.

by emending "sonne" to "somme." The emendation is slight and perhaps we are here to recognize a slip on the part of Adam Scryuen. On the other hand, all the MSS—at least all those so far printed by the Chaucer Society—agree in the reading "sonne." And it should be noted that this is a term not infrequently applied to the Virgin. Compare for example:

Gaude coelorum regina
Sol mirae fulgentiae,¹

as well as the line "praelecta ut sol."² Moreover, Daniel remarks: "Duos locos, *Cant.* vi. 9 et *Apoc.* xii. 1, ecclesia Romana vertit in honorem b. Virginis: comparatur soli et lunae, sole amicta praedicatur."³ As for the term "lyues leche" which Chaucer uses, it may be compared with "Maria medicus," which occurs in Albertus Magnus' *De Laudibus B. M. V.*,⁴ as well as with the phrases "medicamen infirmorum"⁵ and "medicina peccatoris"⁶ in the hymns.⁷

In the fifth stanza of the Invocation Chaucer once more turns aside from Dante, and here again we find him weaving in material from the Latin hymns. An important source for this stanza, as Holthausen has already pointed out,⁸ is the celebrated Marian antiphon, *Salve regina*. I give the text of the antiphon in full, italicizing the phrases utilized by Chaucer:

Salve regina, mater misericordiae
Vita, dulcedo et spes nostra, salve.
Ad te clamamus exules⁹ filii Hevae¹⁰

Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes in hac lacrimarum valle.¹¹

Eia ergo advocata nostra,¹² illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte
Et Iesum benedictum fructum ventris tui nobis post hoc exilium ostende,
*O clemens, o pia, o dulcis virgo*¹³ Maria (Daniel, II, 321).

¹ Mone, II, 193.

⁴ Lib. XI, cap. 2.

² Daniel, II, 32, stanza 3.

⁵ Daniel, II, 213.

³ *Ibid.*, II, 160.

⁶ Mone, II, 201.

⁷ In similar fashion vs. 37, "Thou welle of mercy, sinful soules cure," which is sandwiched in between lines from Dante, seems to owe its origin to the hymn literature. In a hymn by St. Bonaventura we read: "Misericordiae fons dici meruisti" (Daniel, II, 323); cf. also Albertus Magnus' *De Laudibus*, Lib. IX, cap. 1. On "sinful soules cure" cf. the "medicina peccatoris" noted above.

⁸ *Herrigs Archiv*, LXXXVII, 265.

⁹ Cf. "flemed wrecche," vs. 58.

¹⁰ Cf. "sone of Eue," vs. 62.

¹¹ Cf. "in this desert of galle," vs. 58.

¹² Cf. "Be myn aduocat," vs. 68.

¹³ Cf. "thou meke and blisful fayre mayde," vs. 57.

Professor Lounsbury¹ has suggested as the source of Chaucer's "flemed wrecche" and "sone of Eue," a sentence in Bernard's *Tractatus ad Laudem gloriose V. Marie*, which runs: "Respice ergo, beatissima Virgo, ad nos proscriptos in exsilio filios Evae." Bernard's phrase, however—which as we now see was itself derived from the *Salve regina*—brings us no nearer to Chaucer. Moreover, in Bernard's treatise one does not find the other points of resemblance to Chaucer's Invocation which meet us in the antiphon—all grouped within the compass of a few lines. There can be no doubt, therefore, that Chaucer depended upon the antiphon rather than upon Bernard.²

In the sixth stanza, after several lines whose source is not recognizable, Chaucer returns again to the *Paradiso*—a fact which, so far as I am aware, has escaped observation, for the reason, doubtless, that the dependence is not as before upon Canto XXXIII, but upon a passage which occurs slightly earlier. Almost at the end of Canto XXXII one finds, in the description of the highest ranks of the glorified, these lines:

Di contro a Pietro vedi sedere Anna,
Tanto contenta di mirar sua figlia,
Che non muove occhi per cantare Osanna. (vss. 133-35)

When one bears in mind the identity of situation, it appears certain that Chaucer had these lines directly in mind when he wrote:

Be myn aduocat in that heye place
Ther as withouten ende is songe "Osanne,"
Thou Cristes moder, doughter dere of Anne! (vss. 68-70)

It is interesting to note in passing that in the *Man of Law's Tale* Chaucer essentially repeats this couplet:

Mary I mene, doughter to Seint Anne
Before whos child aungeles singe Osanne. (vss. 641-42)

If further proof be needed to convince us that Chaucer still has Dante in mind in the later portion of his Invocation, it will be found in the first four lines of the seventh stanza, which present unmistakable evidence of the influence of the *Paradiso*. That the parallel is not here so complete as in the second and fourth stanzas, where

¹ *Studies in Chaucer*, II, 389, note.

² Professor Lounsbury's suggestion is accepted by Skeat (*Oxford Chaucer*, V, 404), who ignores the parallel pointed out by Holthausen.

Dante is followed throughout, is due to the different situation presented in the two poems. Chaucer is addressing the Virgin directly: Dante, on the other hand, represents the petition as offered in his behalf by Bernard. Bernard prays for the poet:

Perchè *tu ogni nube*¹ gli dislegli
Di sua mortalità coi preghi tuoi,
 Sì che il sommo piacer gli si dispieghi (vss. 31-33).

Chaucer prays for himself:

And of thy lyght my soule in prison lyghte,
 That troubled is by the contagioun
 Of my body.

Bernard asks further:

che conservi sani,
 Dopo tanto veder, gli *affetti* suoi.
 Vinca tua guardia i *movimenti umani*.² (vss. 35-37)

Chaucer asks to be relieved from "the wyghte Of erthly lust and fals affecciou." When one allows for the necessary change from the third person to the first, one sees that Chaucer has here adapted to his own use the phrases of the *Paradiso*.

The figure which Chaucer employs, of the Virgin illumining the darkness of the prison-house (cf. also vs. 66: "That I be quit fro thennes that most derk is"), is not, of course, found in Dante's lines, where it would not have been appropriate. Nevertheless, it is one which occurs frequently in the Latin hymns—if, indeed, Chaucer needed a direct suggestion for it. One may compare, for example, the following stanza from the *Salve sancta mater dei*:

Salve virgo tam sublimis,
 carceratos nos in imis
 prece tua libera,
 in te juva confidentes
 et devote recensentes
 tua sancta munera.³

¹ Dr. G. A. Scartazzini's note on this word is of interest: "*Nube*: quella oscurità che dà il corpo all' anima" (*Div. Comm.*, ed. Leipzig, 1882).

² See again Scartazzini's note: "*i movimenti*: non solo gl' impulsi dell' umano orgoglio ma in generale gli urti delle umane passioni."

³ Mone, *Lat. Hymn.*, II, 282.

The word "contagion," which Chaucer employs in v. 72, is of such infrequent occurrence as to call for a remark.¹ Though suggested, as we have seen, by the "nube di mortalità" in the *Paradiso*, it is hardly a close counterpart of the Italian phrase. It may be noted that in a hymn to the Virgin written by St. Bonaventura essentially the same expression occurs—though in adjective instead of substantive construction:

In hac valle miseræ multum tenebrosa
Hominum sunt genera multum foetosa,
Nam eorum opera sunt contagiosa
Propter facta scelera et opprobriosa.²

It would surely be spending labor in vain to seek a definite source for the pious exclamations with which the Invocation concludes. "Hauen of refut" is a phrase which Chaucer had previously used in his *ABC* poem (vs. 14), translating Deguileville's "de salu porte"; and it occurs again in the *Man of Law's Tale* (vs. 852). Similar expressions are also applied to the Virgin in the Latin hymns.³ As for the clause which follows—"o saluacioun Of hem that been in sorwe and in distresse"—an innumerable host of similar phrases might be collected, not only from the hymns but from devotional literature in general.⁴

¹ "Contagion," curiously enough, is not registered in the Glossarial Index of the *Oxford Chaucer*, nor in Bradley-Stratmann or Mätzner. The *New Eng. Dict.*, also, fails to record Chaucer's use of it, citing as the earliest instance a passage in Trevisa.

² Daniel, *Thes. Hymn.*, II, 324.

³ Cf. "portus navigantium" (Daniel, II, 197, stanza 7); also "in portu salutari" (Daniel, II, 213, stanza 12).

⁴ I cite a few specimens from the hymns:

Ave salus infirmorum
et solamen miserorum.
—Mone, II, 202.

Quae es in angustiis
Et in rebus dubiis
Salus et solatium.
—Daniel, II, 197, stanza 4.

Tu animarum spes afflictarum dulcis Maria.
—Daniel II, 186, vs. 16.

Tu peccatorum venia
spes desperatorum.
—Morel, *Lat. Hymn. des Mittelalt.*, No. 205, stanza 5.

Spes et salus infirmorum
sublevatrix oppressorum.
—Kehreins, *Sequenzen des Mittelalt.*, p. 208.

O Maria languidorum
dulcis consolatio
tu adjutrix miserorum
mihi sis protectio.
—Mone, II, 286, vss. 61–64.

As the result of this scrutiny of Chaucer's Invocation item by item, two important conclusions may be drawn as to its general structure. The first is, that the Invocation was composed in one piece and cannot be separated into two sections, one written before Chaucer knew the *Paradiso* and the other added later. This is the view which has been put forward by Professor Skeat. "I am persuaded," he remarks, "that ll. 36-56 (three stanzas) were added at a later period. Being taken from Dante, they could hardly have been written very early; whereas the Life of St. Cecile seems to have been quite a juvenile performance."¹ Postponing for the moment the question of chronology which is here raised, I may note briefly the objections to regarding vss. 36-56 as "a later insertion," as Professor Skeat terms them (p. 404).

In the first place, the center of gravity—to borrow a term from physics—of the Invocation lies within these very lines. Imagine a prayer to the Virgin which should omit all reference to the part which she played in the Incarnation! Yet if these lines be removed these references at once disappear. It is impossible, therefore, to suppose that Chaucer could at any time have written the Invocation with vs. 57 following immediately after vs. 35.

Again, Professor Skeat leaves out of account the reference to Bernard in vs. 30—

Of whom that Bernard list so wel to wryte—

which seems to imply that Chaucer already had the *Paradiso* in mind. Dante, it will be remembered, represents the prayer at the beginning of Canto XXXIII as uttered by Bernard. This occurrence of Bernard's name in both poems can hardly be fortuitous. Bernard, to be sure, wrote much in praise of the Virgin, but it is clear that he did not supply the source for Chaucer's Invocation. On the other hand, Chaucer's line is at once explained if we suppose that this ostensible reference to Bernard he actually intended as a delicate acknowledgment to Dante himself.

Finally, the theory of "a later insertion" breaks down completely with the discovery that the influence of Dante does not cease at vs. 56, but is clearly discernible, here and there, down to vs. 74, only three lines from the close.

¹ *Oxford Chaucer*, V, 403; cf. also III, 485.

The other conclusion from our examination of the Invocation has to do with Chaucer's use of the Latin hymns. The extent of their influence upon these lines has not hitherto been appreciated. There are two clear instances of direct borrowing from well-known hymns; and in a number of other lines, though no definite source is recognizable, the phraseology of the hymns appears. No one imagines, to be sure, that Chaucer ransacked the hymnbook to assemble his materials. In most cases the influence of the hymns upon him may have been almost unconscious. For we may easily believe that the phrases which he took from this source had become so familiar to him through the liturgy and manuals of devotion that when he sat down to write this prayer to the Virgin they came into mind unbidden. At all events, our examination of the Invocation has made it clear that if the warp of the fabric be from Dante, the woof was supplied by these hymns.¹

The Invocation is not, therefore, a mere paraphrase of the prayer in the *Paradiso*. Chaucer allows himself to digress at will from Dante's *terzine*. And as he proceeds with his work this freedom becomes more and more noticeable. In a word, then, the Invocation is a skilful mosaic into which scattered materials have been fitted according to a harmonious pattern.

It is time now to consider the chronological problem which this Invocation presents. Professor Skeat felt it difficult, it will be remembered, to believe that Chaucer was already acquainted with Dante at the time when he composed the *Lyf of St. Cecile*, which he considered "quite a juvenile performance." This difficulty is now increased rather than diminished. For the influence of the prayer in the *Paradiso*, instead of being restricted to vss. 36-56, is seen to extend over the whole Invocation. Indeed, we may fairly

¹ I believe that a detailed examination of the prayers to the Virgin in the Prioress's Prologue and the Man of Law's Tale would reveal the similar employment of phrases scattered through the Latin hymns. As a single example I note that the phrase in the Prioress's Prologue,

the whyte lily flour
Which that thee bar, and is a mayde alway,

is to be compared with lines from the Sequence, *Flos pudicitie*:

castitatis liliū
Prole fecunda, gignis dei filium;
Virgo, que munda tu post puerperium.
—Daniel, II, 247.

This sequence, which occurs in the thirteenth century MS, Arundel 248 (fol. 153b), is, as Daniel notes, of English origin.

suppose that Dante supplied the initial suggestion for its composition. Moreover, Chaucer not only makes use of the prayer in Canto XXXIII but avails himself of a *terzina* in the preceding Canto. It is unlikely that Chaucer began his reading of the *Paradiso* at the last canto, or even that he opened the *Paradiso* before reading the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. At the time he wrote this Invocation, therefore, he had probably gone through the whole of the *Divina Commedia*. On the other hand, the date ordinarily assigned to the *Lyf of St. Cecile* by the chronologists is 1373-74. The question at once presents itself: Is it possible that Chaucer, within the twelve-month following his return from the first visit to Italy, had read so widely in the *Divina Commedia* as seems to be implied by this use of a passage which stands in its very last canto?

There are two ways of escaping this chronological difficulty. The first is to set back the *Lyf of St. Cecile* to a later date. This is the position taken by Professor Kittredge, who in his recent monograph¹ expresses the opinion that "the date usually adopted, 1373 or 1374, seems on the whole a little too early."

The second is, to suppose that the *Inuocacio ad Mariam* was composed at a later date and inserted in its present position. This is the view suggested by Mr. Pollard. "The Invocation," he writes in the note previously referred to, "is certainly better work than the story itself and may have been added some years afterwards. . . . Ten Brink himself assigned both poems [i.e., the *ABC* and the *Cecile*] to the date usually assigned to the *Cecile*, viz., about 1373. I should myself be inclined to bring them both back to the date usually given to the *ABC*, viz., about 1366."²

Our choice between these two views, it is clear, turns entirely upon the question whether the Invocation is a later insertion. If the *Lyf of St. Cecile* as originally written included the Invocation it would be impossible, for the reasons given above, to date it as early as 1374. Ten Brink, who set this up as the lower date for the

¹ *The Date of Chaucer's Troilus and Other Chaucer Matters*, Chaucer Soc., 1909, p. 41.

² *Cant. Tales*, 1894, p. xiv, note; cf. also *Chaucer Primer*, p. 34. Mr. Paget Toynbee has recently given indorsement to this view that the Invocation is a later addition: "That this was the case with the *Inuocacio ad Mariam* in the *Second Nun's Tale* (which is in fact a more or less youthful poem—the *Lyf of Seynt Cecile*—composed probably in 1373, and afterwards embodied by Chaucer in the *Canterbury Tales*) there can hardly be a doubt" (*Dante in Engl. Literature*, 1909, p. xv).

poem, relied wholly upon Chaucer's remarks upon idleness in the introductory stanzas, which in his opinion would not have been written after June 8, 1374, when Chaucer entered upon his duties at the Customs Office. The conventional character of these lines upon idleness, however, makes it unsafe to rely upon them in dating the poem.

There is nothing, therefore, to hinder us from putting the *Lyf of St. Cecile* as late in the seventies as we please—except the literary workmanship of the poem itself. All critics agree that it is written in Chaucer's earlier manner. Professor Kittredge, though he favors a date later than 1374, freely recognizes this. "Style, metre, everything about the poem," he writes, "are in perfect accord with assignment to the French period. The only thing Italian is the invocation to the Virgin from Dante's *Paradiso*." The very fact, then, that the Invocation in comparison with the rest of the poem stands out as a purple patch suggests that it may be a piece of new cloth on an old garment, and so leads us to consider the suggestion of Mr. Pollard, that "it may have been added some years afterwards."¹

In favor of this view, in the first place, is the fact that the workmanship of the Invocation is distinctly superior to that of the rest of the Prologue or of the *Lyf* itself. Those who believe that the entire Prologue, in the form in which we have it, was written at one time explain the superior merit of these seven stanzas as the result of the uplift from the *Paradiso*. But to give Dante the whole credit for the improved style of the Invocation seems to me not altogether fair to Chaucer. For Chaucer's lines, as we have seen, are something more than mere imitation. No small part of the skill in the Invocation is that displayed in weaving together materials from scattered sources. But this skill in combining materials is just what is conspicuously absent from the *Lyf of St. Cecile*, in which, as Kölbing and Holthausen have demonstrated, Chaucer has followed his original in every detail.

A more important consideration, however, in determining the question before us is the relation of the Invocation to its context. If one reads Chaucer's text, omitting the Invocation, it will be seen

¹ Professor Kittredge does not ignore this possibility, but dismisses it briefly in a footnote: "There is no reason for regarding the prayer as a later insertion. Its connection is perfect, and if it is thought to be better than the rest of the poem, the superiority is at once intelligible when one remembers whom Chaucer is following" (*loc. cit.*, note).

that vs. 78 follows vs. 28 without a break. Indeed, there would be, it seems to me, a positive improvement in the connection. The closing line of the Invocation,

Now help, for to my werk I wol me dresse,
was written, one may suppose, to join the Invocation to what follows. But it will be observed Chaucer does not yet "dresse him to his werk," but proceeds with an apology to his reader:

Foryeue me, that I do no diligence
This ilke storie subtilly to endyte.

This apology continues the thought of vss. 24-26, in which he speaks of the fidelity with which he has translated the legend. Note again that in this concluding stanza Cecile, though not mentioned by name, is referred to in a way which supposes that the reader has her name directly in mind:

him that at the seintes reuerence
The storie wroot, and folwe hir legende.

Nevertheless, as the text now stands, seven stanzas devoted to the Virgin intervene since the last mention of Cecile. On the other hand, let this concluding stanza follow directly after vs. 28,

Thee mene I, mayde and martir seynt Cecilie,
and there is no longer any occasion to repeat the name.

I am not disposed to insist upon these considerations as conclusively establishing the later addition of the Invocation, though the fact that these seven stanzas may be stricken out without leaving any gap in the Prologue appears to me significant. It may be granted, on the other hand, that as the text now stands the Invocation is neatly joined to the lines which precede and follow. This, however, is hardly decisive against the view that it was added later. For, at the time when he was capable of the excellent lines of the Invocation, Chaucer might be expected to succeed in fitting them into their present position without too obvious a suture.

The present form of the text, then, at least opposes no obstacle to the theory that the Invocation is a later addition. Moreover, it is possible to understand how the suggestion for its insertion may have come into Chaucer's mind. If, after the prayer in the *Paradiso* had moved him to admiration and then to imitation, Chaucer had read over the introductory stanzas of the *Lyf of St. Cecile*, he would

have noted the brief sentence addressing Cecile, and from this might easily have conceived the idea of adding at that point an invocation to the Virgin. Without calling up the spirit of Chaucer himself it is, of course, impossible to prove that this is what actually occurred. At the same time this hypothesis appears to offer a plausible explanation for a passage which otherwise presents a puzzling anachronism.

Finally, if this hypothesis of the later date of the Invocation be accepted, is there any means of fixing even approximately the time at which it was added? Manifestly it must have been written before the *Lyf* was incorporated in the *Canterbury Tales*; otherwise we should not find in it the phrase, "unworthy sone of Eue." It is possible, I believe, to narrow the limits somewhat further, by observing that the two other poems in which Chaucer shows the direct influence of the *Paradiso* are the *Hous of Fame* and the *Troilus*.¹ Moreover, in the *Troilus*,² as Koepfel has pointed out,³ Chaucer weaves into an apostrophe to Love certain lines from this very prayer in Canto XXXIII. From the fact that the Dante lines here used are passed over in the Invocation of the *Lyf of St. Cecile*, Koepfel argued that the *Troilus* must have been written first. This contention, however, was thoroughly refuted by ten Brink,⁴ and has been generally discredited. Indeed, on the face of it one would say that the serious imitation of the prayer which is found in Chaucer's Invocation is more likely to have preceded the perversion of Dante's phrases to a secular purpose in the *Troilus*. We shall hardly be mistaken, therefore, in assuming that the composition of the Invocation preceded the *Troilus*. At the same time, that Chaucer when writing a purely secular apostrophe to Love should so readily recall the phrases of Dante's prayer to the Virgin strongly suggests that this passage in the *Paradiso* was still fresh in his mind. And from this one may infer, it seems to me, that the interval between the Invocation and the *Troilus* was not long.

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¹ I do not include the Prologue of the Prioress, which in the fourth stanza shows undoubted resemblance to the phrases of the prayer in Canto XXXIII of the *Paradiso*, for the reason that Chaucer's language is here more directly parallel to the fourth stanza of his own Invocation in the *Lyf of St. Cecile*. It would appear, therefore, that in the Prioress's Prologue he was not making direct use of Dante's text.

² Book III, 1261-65.

³ *Anglia*, XIV, 230.

⁴ *Engl. Stud.*, XVII, 1 ff.